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SCHOOLSCAPES

WORKING TOGETHER **TO INSTRUCT, SOCIALIZE AND PROVIDE QUALIFICATION**

BULLYING TAXING

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By Claudine St Germain (Translation)

The eradication of bullying and taxing calls for concerted actions from all stakeholders. In light of this, the Ministère de l'Éducation, Ministère de la Sécurité publique, and Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux joined forces to work together.

ducation Minister Sylvain Simard and Public Security Minister Serge Ménard opened the Conference on Bullying and Taxing at School held in Montréal on January 22 and 23, 2003. "With this conference, we want to break the silence surrounding taxing and bullying," Mr. Simard told an audience of several hundred participants.

Québec

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An important reflection was initiated in the Fall of 2002, with the publication by the Ministère de la Sécurité publique of the report entitled *Les jeunes et le taxage au Québec* [Québec youth and taxing]. The report revealed that 10% of young people said they had been victims of taxing, that 50% are concerned that they might be taxed, and that 60% are affected by the phenomenon.

"This happens to be a very real problem, on a scale unknown until now," said Mr. Ménard. "We have a collective responsibility to act. Several stakeholders are called on to participate in searching for and implementing solutions. Without concerted effort, these actions may well be ineffective."

Needless to say, various actions have been taken in Québec for a number of years. For example, the Ministère de l'Éducation offers various training sessions on bullying every year to school staff. In many places, community organizations have implemented prevention programs, in collaboration with schools and local social services. These actions, and others that are forthcoming will be supported and supervised by the three ministries involved.

forms of violence, such as spousal abuse."

Challenges for schools

In his closing address, Sylvain Simard announced more specific measures that will be taken in schools. He identified several important courses of action: schools must act in collaboration with parents and the community; actions must be sustained over a period a time and aimed at preventing the problem; when violence is manifested, schools must help victims and aggressors; lastly, schools must emphasize that they do not accept violence and they must make their prevention strategy known.

"Starting in September, the Ministère de l'Éducation will launch a province-wide awareness campaign on bullying and taxing in order to break the silence, to get young people talking and to encourage adults to listen to them," the Education Minister announced. "The Ministère de l'Éducation and Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux will also make tools available to the school network in order to foster a healthy environment for young people. We will put forward indicators to evaluate the level of health, security and well-being of students." A centre of expertise will also be set up, with a mandate to support schools in their efforts.

"This conference is the starting point of a movement to put an end to bullying and taxing," concluded Simard.

"Several stakeholders are called on to participate in searching for and implementing solutions. Without concerted effort, these actions may well be ineffective," says Serge Ménard, Public Security Minister.

"By remaining silent, society reinforces victims' silence," said Roger Bertrand, Minister for Health, Social Services, Youth Protection and Prevention. "If we are going to help young people to resist bullying and taxing, we must break the isolation and counter any attempt made to trivialize these phenomena. This is how we acted to reduce other

Three quarters of teenagers say and one in every ten students is

By Claudine St-Germain
(Translation)

Richard Gagné, secretary of the Association québécoise des psychologues scolaires, has long been active in the fight against bullying. The portrait he painted of bullying was very helpful to workshop participants in understanding the nature of this disturbing phenomenon.

they have been victims at least once, a chronic victim of bullying.

Bullying is a universal problem. All studies, regardless of country or environment, have collected more or less similar statistics. Everywhere in the world, children are victims of bullying, peers stand by without intervening, and a code of silence is in effect.

"Adults find it strange that children should be afraid to go to school," said Richard Gagné. "In their view, school is one of the safest places to be. However, when we ask children what they consider to be very important for them, they answer: 'to feel safe, not to be hurt by anyone.' This is significant."

According to Gagné, the fear of bullying is a major concern for 25% of all students. Three quarters of teenagers say they have been victims at least once, and one in every ten students is a chronic victim of bullying. On the other hand, at least 50% of students are not affected by the problem. "Bullying occurs in all social environments, be they affluent or underprivileged, rural or urban, and in public or private schools," said Gagné. "In all human relationships that are built up, there is a power relationship that sets in."

Not just a petty argument

According to Gagné, children are victims of bullying when other children say hurtful things about them, make fun of them or call them names in a mean way; ignore them completely or consciously exclude them from their peer group or activities; hit them, push them, shove them or lock them inside a room; tell or write lies about them, spread false rumours to get other children to reject them, or abuse them in any other way.

It is important to distinguish between bullying and normal arguments that may arise among children. Friendly and pleasant teasing is not considered bullying. Neither is a conflict between two children who are as strong as one another and who argue on an equal footing. Bullying necessarily involves repeated acts and a power imbalance. Generally speaking, there is an escalation of aggression over time, whether acts of physical aggression occur or not.

"Although bullying and taxing are often associated, important distinctions must be made between the two problems," said Gagné. "Taxing implies theft and is always seen as a serious offence, whereas bullying is often trivialized. The two phenomena need to be dealt with differently: in the case of taxing, there must be repressive intervention, whereas bullying must first be addressed in an educational manner. Also, taxing is a relatively rare phenomenon in school, while bullying occurs in all institutions, every week."

Bullying clearly has major consequences on victims, including, among others, humiliation, anxiety, low self-esteem, reduced academic achievement (it has been shown that 15% of school absenteeism is related to bullying), and increase in the risk of suicide. Fortunately, most victims make it to adulthood unscathed. Such is not the case with aggressors, whose deviant behaviour may creep into all of their relationships. Research has shown that children who bully are more at risk of having aggressive or criminal behaviours as adults.

Adults' responsibilities

"It's normal at their age," "Children must learn to solve their own problems," "What takes place outside of school does not concern us": these are some of the preconceived notions that many adults have about bullying. How surprising is it that victims remain silent? "Children do not speak out because they may fear retaliation from bullies, confuse informing on and denouncing, or have experienced a negative situation where an adult did not take their problem seriously," said Gagné. This applies both to teachers and parents. According to the psychologist, 50% of parents are not aware that their child is a victim of bullying.

Adults, and the school staff in particular, can, however, definitely contribute to put an end to bullying. "This is not a problem that can be solved with one awareness week: you need at least two years of efforts to really make a difference," said Gagné. "And it's not a matter solely for specialists, but also for teachers, who are at the forefront of adult-child relationships at school."

Gagné proposes an educational and non-repressive approach. He specifically recommends that schools establish a safe and friendly environment for their students. Adults in school must work as "social architects" and develop positive interactions between children. Students need to understand that bullying affects everyone and that they can act to put a stop to it, even if they are not directly involved. As for bullies, they must face consequences that are clear, firm and more educational than punitive.

"Addressing the problem of bullying is related to the school's mission to socialize," reminded Richard Gagné. "It depends largely on the school community's commitment to take action."

By Claudine St-Germain
(Translation)

"Adults don't always know how to react to bullying," says Debra Pepler. "Imagine that a child says to his teacher that his classmates are making fun of him because he wears glasses. The teacher says to him: "Come on, many people wear glasses! Tell them to stop." In so doing, this teacher fails on two accounts. First, she does not understand that the bullying is occurring all the time: perhaps the child only told her the tip of the iceberg. Next, by telling the child to solve the problem himself, she sets him up for failure. Victims try a new strategy each time they are bullied (running away, replying, pretending they don't care, etc.). If these strategies had worked, this child would not have confided in his teacher."

view our actions negatively, our power lessens," explains the researcher.

What does Debra Pepler suggest that the school teams do? First of all, instil a sense of empathy in children and create an institutional culture where it is "cool" to help others. "It's easy with young children, but empathy has a tendency to lessen at the beginning of adolescence," she warns.

She also recommends developing certain social skills with students: communication, development of self-esteem, and recognition and acceptance of others and their differences. Finally, it is essential that adults teach through example by not intimidating the children themselves.

The school team can certainly take action to confront bullying. This is the message of two researchers specialized in this issue.

Debra Pepler, professor at York University in Toronto and director of the LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution, has worked for years to develop prevention and intervention strategies for both bullies and victims. Her research has led her to conclude that bullying is not always easy for adults to detect. "It's not always physical violence," she points out. "It may be vicious rumours or a group that excludes a particular child. Children are very creative at finding ways to taunt another child."

"So the victims of bullying end up seeing the school as an unpleasant and even hostile place," says François Bowen, Assistant Dean of research and graduate studies at the education faculty of Université de Montréal. "About 10% of students will need specialized services in special education over the course of their studies, and a great many of them have problems connected with violence, either as victims or perpetrators."

"In a bullying situation, both the victim and the bully need help. But to prevent the problem and truly create a healthy and safe climate at school, we have to target all children," says the researcher. "Bullying doesn't happen in isolation.

"Sometimes we forget: we get angry and ask a child, 'Are you crazy?'" she says. In so doing, we give children permission to do the same with their peers."

"To prevent the problem and truly create a healthy and safe climate at school, we have to target all children," says Debra Pepler.

Our research shows that other children are present in 85% of the episodes. In 75% of the cases, the peers are on the side of the bully. All these children who then say "I didn't do anything!" in fact play a key role."

The evidence shows that in 10 to 20% of the episodes, the peers intervene, "which is a higher intervention rate than teachers," remarks Debra Pepler. And when they intervene, these children are able to stop the bullying in under 10 seconds, 57% of the time. "Bullying is a question of dominance, a need to show to the group that we have power. If the spectators leave, or if they

For his part, François Bowen suggests to gear class management toward participation and interaction rather than competition and individualism. "The climate of the school is also important. We should create a cooperative environment where everyone can find ways to be successful and where there is a sense of belonging."

Debra Pepler ended by congratulating the conference participants for increasing their awareness about the issue of bullying and taking action to curb it. "It's not a problem that's going to go away on its own: we have to keep it in check," she concluded.

for safe and healthy schools

By Alexandre Robillard
(Translation)

To respond effectively, we need to understand. In this regard, the plan of the Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM) provides a good overview of the dynamics of bullying

The Commission scolaire de Montréal has drawn up a bullying prevention plan, providing an opportunity for Daniel Martin and Raymond Tozzi, the two pedagogical consultants in charge of the project, to summarize the dynamics of bullying.

"Bullying is an act of power and involves frequent and repeated incidents. Bullies try to cause psychological or physical harm to victims who are ill-equipped to defend themselves properly," explains Daniel Martin.

Boys are more likely to be bullies than girls. Bullies have a limited ability to manage interpersonal conflicts and mistakenly attribute hostile intentions to others. Besides their need to dominate, they lack empathy and inflict suffering without feeling remorse.

Victims often come from overprotective family environments. At school, they demand a lot of attention and often stay close to adults. Victims might be singled out because they are experiencing academic difficulties, have a physical or intellectual handicap or because they are a member of an ethnic or minority group, and thus attract the attention of bullies.

Both pedagogical consultants stress the important role of witnesses. "We have to get them to understand that their intervention in this type of situation will truly make a difference. Studies show that 10 seconds is all it takes for someone to put a stop to bullying," says Raymond Tozzi.

Since January, this information has been made available to seven schools in the Montreal area taking part in the project. During training workshops, the pedagogical consultants have suggested a number of steps to help schools implement a comprehensive bullying prevention plan.

Schools are invited to form work groups to address the issue and then to get parents and students involved. The process leads them to make a school declaration against bullying that is adapted to their environment. Schools also make use of a surveillance plan to determine everyone's role and identify areas and moments that are liable to increase the risk of bullying. "All free time that is not structured maximizes opportunities for bullying," says Martin.

A major component of the consultants' intervention plan is the relational aspect, which entails a follow-up process involving both bullies and victims. A restorative approach can be considered, but only after ensuring that aggressors acknowledge the harm they have done. "Otherwise, all forms of mediation will be ineffective," warns Tozzi.

School plans and the first intervention measures will be prepared this year so that an impact evaluation can be made in 2003-2004, thereby allowing for integration into a greater number of schools in 2004-2005.

By Alexandre Robillard
(Translation)

Combating bullying requires continual effort over a period of several years. Two schools share their experiences.

Representatives of two school teams from the Commission scolaire du Val-des-Cerfs shared their experiences and successes in dealing with bullying in their schools. They stressed the importance of remaining vigilant: while it is, indeed possible to curb bullying, the problem never completely goes away.

France St-Louis, principal of St-Bernardin de Waterloo School, illustrated how the bullying problem reared its ugly head during what they now call their "October crisis," of 1997. One lunch hour, about a hundred students began chasing another student around the schoolyard. The child was panic-stricken. The monitors lost control. It was time to act.

In early 1998, the school organized a bullying awareness week. As part of the activities, there were visits by the principal to the classrooms, videos on bullying were shown, and intercom messages and wall posters to further drive the point home. The problem was discussed in the classroom, and whether they were victims or bullies, students had to learn what bullying was all about. School staff literally had literally taken the bull by the horns! Six years later, there are signs of an improvement. "Children no longer wait two months before coming to talk to us," said Julie Larochelle, a teacher at St-Bernardin.

At Joseph-Poitevin School in Granby, an exploratory survey of students in 1995 revealed that 22 percent had been subjected to bullying at school. Two years later, the school team's efforts seemed to be working: the rate dropped to 15 percent. However, in 2001, the problem was on the rise again. "There will always be bullying. It doesn't go away," said school principal Claude Ouellette. A committee was then set up to ensure planning and follow-up. Its mission is to ensure that intervention efforts are constant and permanent—a strategy adopted at St-Bernardin as well.

In addition to taking each bullying case seriously, the representatives of the two schools demonstrated the importance of ensuring follow-up, continuing to dialogue with both bullies and victims, and keeping a written record of incidents.

While it is mere wishful thinking to believe that bullying can be completely eradicated, maintaining a day-to-day presence does send a clear message, and is likely to foster positive behaviours to help prevent and curb this form of violence.

By Eve Krakow

The Method of Shared Concern is a strategy for dealing with group bullying. It aims to break the 'mob mentality' and draw out the bully's empathy for the victim through individual, non-accusatory talks with the members of the bully group.

Many kids involved in group bullying situations experience a certain amount of guilt, but they suppress it because they want to belong to the group," said Eva de Gosztonyi, coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for Behaviour Management. "But when we separate them and help them realize what's really happening to the victim, we can help them see another way of being."

Developed by Swedish psychologist Anatol Pikas, the method essentially works as follows. After identifying a bully/victim problem and the children that may be involved, you meet with each child individually and share your concern for the victim. For example, you might say, "I've noticed that things aren't going well for Tom. He doesn't want to come to school anymore, his grades are going down. Something's bothering him—what do you think?"

The idea is not to attribute blame or to "get to the bottom of things," but to encourage the child to work with you. "You want the kid to acknowledge that something's not going right for the person who's being victimized, and ask his or her willingness to try and help, in some minute way," explained de Gosztonyi. The interviewer then arranges to meet with the child again in a short time to see how things are going.

It is critical to see the bullies before the victim, so that they cannot accuse the victim of having told on them. "Ideally, it's something you notice as an outsider, or someone has alerted you to the situation." Only after all the suspected bullies have been seen do you meet with the victim and offer support.

Individual meetings continue until significant progress has been made. Eventually, a meeting is held with the whole group to talk about their behaviour. Finally, the group invites the victim to a meeting to demonstrate that the bullying situation is truly over.

While relatively new to Québec, the method has been used extensively in England and Australia. Research shows that it is effective in about two out of three cases. At the workshop, quite a few people said they had used similar strategies, but that this method offered some of the missing elements. "Many participants already working on this issue said this was another tool they would definitely try and use," de Gosztonyi noted.

www.education.unisa.edu.au/bullying/concern.html

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